

## BOOK REVIEW

GARY PAUL NABHAM and ANA GUADALUPE VALENZUELA-ZAPATA. 2004. **Tequila! A Natural and Cultural History.** (ISBN 0-8165-1937-4, pbk.). The University of Arizona Press, 355 S. Euclid, Ste. 103, Tucson, AZ 85719, U.S.A. (Orders: 520-621-1441, fax 520-621-8899, [www.uapress.arizona.edu](http://www.uapress.arizona.edu)). \$14.95 pbk., \$29.95 hbk., 160 pp., 20 b/w, 5 1/2" x 9 1/4".

It is always a pleasure to share in someone else's passion. From the very beginning of this book, it is obvious that Ms. Valenzuela-Zapata and Mr. Nabham enjoy a passion for the agave plant. They bring us along when they gaze over vast hillsides of blue agave and when they compare varieties from all areas of Mexico. They require us to mourn with them how the over planting of one species has led to serious disease and infestation of the agave fields. They take us into the fields as the well trained agave harvesters, or jimadores, chop leaves off the agave to make the pineapple shaped cores that will be roasted and distilled into tequila.

Where the authors do not take us is out onto the patio to sip the finished product with them so we can learn about the different varieties and how to choose a good tequila. The Mexican government's descriptions of the four kinds of tequila are on page 52-3 and then a series of pictures shows the reader every stage of tequila production from planting propagules to the aging process of the finished liquor. Otherwise there is no tasting guide, as one might expect from a book called "Wine" or "Vodka!"

Good information can be found throughout on cultivation, and there are four appendices ranging from a glossary of terms to species descriptions of agaves used in the tequila industry. There is also material on the cultural history of pulque, mescal and tequila. The main focus of the book to this reader remains the devastating effects of relying on one species of agave. Whether or not it was the authors' intention, the next time I take a sip of tequila I will be reminded of the "gangrene" epidemic in the fields, which is a bitter aftertaste to a favorite drink.—Karen Hall, Library Volunteer, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, Fort Worth, TX, 76102-4060, U.S.A.